

Marty  
Hollitt  
and the  
Amazing  
Game  
Machine

JENNY PAUSACKER

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AMAZING GAME MACHINE**

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## CHAPTER ONE

“Mum, why don’t we have TV?” said Marty.

“Oh, come on, Marty. We talked about all that ages ago,” said Mrs Hollitt. “I don’t have time now.” She put her hand on Marty’s shoulder. “Shall I tell Granny you’ll come in to see her this afternoon?”

Marty pretended to think about it. She hated her grandmother’s nursing home. It smelt, and her grandmother just lay there most of the time with her eyes shut.

“Not this afternoon,” she said.

“All right,” said Mrs Hollitt. She picked up her bag, then put it down and gave Marty a big hug. Marty wasn’t impressed. Her mother wasn’t going to answer her question. Okay, then, Marty wasn’t going to hug her.

She sat stiffly inside the hug, until Mrs Hollitt let go, looking sad. Marty felt sorry then, but her mother was already leaving. She ran after her.

“Give Gran my love.”

“Sure,” said Mrs Hollitt, and waved.

Marty went back into the kitchen and kicked the fridge. It hurt.

“What’s the matter with you?” said her sister Jan from behind her.

She didn’t wait for an answer, but went to look at a list on the wall. Jan had always dodged housework. Then their grandmother got sick, and Mrs Hollitt had to visit her all the time. Jan had started to make lists about cooking and cleaning. She also made sure

everyone did their jobs properly.

“You’re on sandwich duty today,” she told Marty now. “Chunderous fritz and tomato sauce for Phil, and the rest of us can have the left-over lamb. Right?”

“Right, boss.”

Marty margarined bread slowly, and watched Jan. She looked as if she were trying to set an Olympic record for breakfast making. When an egg broke or a piece of toast burned, she swore horribly.

“Jan, do you ever wish we had TV?”

“Nope,” said Jan, shaking the frying pan.

“Why not?”

“Ssh, I’m getting to the hard part,” said Jan. She turned two of the eggs, and stopped to think. “Everyone has TV,” she said. “I like being different.”

“You would,” said Marty. “Anyway, what’s so different about making lists and cooking breakfasts? You said you’d never learn to cook.”

“Well, I was wrong,” said Jan, leaning back on the stove. “You’ve got to eat. And my lists mean everyone does their fair share.”

She went on telling Marty about it. Obviously she wasn’t going to answer Marty’s question either. Marty tuned out, and watched the smoke spiralling up from the toaster. Jan’s toast was burning again. She giggled, and Jan looked round.

“You pig,” she shouted. “Okay, that’s your toast. Make your own, if you want more.”

She chucked the pieces of black toast at Marty, yelled, “Phil! Dad!” out the door, and started to slap eggs and toast onto plates. Marty turned away, and blinked back two big tears. I won’t say I’m sorry, she thought.

She took a piece of bread for her egg, and sat down next to Phil. He had already eaten half his breakfast.

“Not bad,” he said to Jan. “Funky Pops’d be easier though — and you get these great tatts in the packet.”

“Tatts?” Jan asked.

“Tattoos,” said Phil, with a pitying look. “It’s on TV. The real heavy brekky food.”

“How do you know what’s on TV?” asked Marty.

“Kids at school tell me.”

That would be right, thought Marty. One week at a new school, and Phil knew kids who would tell him what he needed to know. He made friends quickly. Marty took a long time.

Mr Hollitt came in, rubbing his eyes. He looked around for hidden traps, then sat down and started to eat. He was always strange and silent in the morning, because he took a long time to wake up. Jan never put him on the list for making breakfast. He would have been hopeless.

Marty knew there was no point in asking him her question. But at least she could ask

Phil in front of him.

“Phil, do you ever wish we had TV?”

“I’d rather have a good stereo,” said Phil loudly, for Mr Hollitt to hear.

Mr Hollitt jumped like a frightened rabbit, then bent over his egg again. Marty sighed heavily, and went to wrap up the sandwiches.

“What’s the matter with you today?” asked Phil.

“No one ever listens in this family,” muttered Marty.

“That’s because everyone says such dumb things,” said Phil. He took his sandwiches and went off, singing happily.

*“No one ever listens in this family,  
In this family,  
In this family.  
No one ever listens in this family.  
Oh, ain’t it just a shame?”*

Jan, still angry, banged the plates into the dish-washer, and took her sandwiches without saying thank you. Marty sighed again.

“Why do you want TV?”

Marty nearly fell through the floor. Her father was talking in the morning. She turned round.

“Because everyone at school talks about it all the time.”

“All the time?” said Mr Hollitt. He was like that. He called it logical. Marty called it annoying.

“Well, a lot of the time,” said Marty. “All the games are about Ripper and the Bean — they’re on this cop show — and —”

Mr Hollitt opened his mouth to speak.

“Oh, all right,” said Marty. “Not *all* the games. But a lot of them. I feel left out.”

“Do you talk about what you do at home? Your books, or your games?”

“No one would be interested.”

“Hm. Try it and see.” Mr Hollitt’s eyes wandered, then he made an effort. “It’s always hard at a new school. Tell me how it goes.” He yawned, and went.

“Forget it,” said Marty to the empty room. “Forget it. Forget it. Forget it.”

Anyway, it might be all right. Maybe the kids would talk to her today . . .

Marty knew what her father would say to that. “Don’t any of the kids talk to you?” Well, some of the kids talked to her already but maybe the kids she liked would talk to her today.

After that, Marty felt better. All the same, when she saw Con Georgiou waiting on his bike outside Toula and Jimmy’s house, her heart thumped. She pretended to tie up the

lace of her sneaker, and waited till Toula and Jimmy came out, waving to Con.

To Marty's eyes, the three of them seemed to sparkle in the morning sun. Con's bike flashed; the flowers danced on Toula's skirt; Jimmy's straight black hair shone. Marty felt faded and scruffy. There's nothing wrong with wearing comfortable clothes, she told herself.

She marched up to them. They were already talking hard about what they had done last night. Con's brother and his family had called round, so Con had missed the end of *Ripper and the Bean*. Marty walked along at Toula's side. When Toula finished telling Con the story, Marty pulled at her sleeve.

"Hi," said Marty with a big smile.

"Oh, hi," said Toula with a little smile.

"Sounds like a good show last night. Hey, have you ever read *The Thirty Nine Steps* by John Buchan? I reckon you'd like it, if you like Ripper and the Bean."

"What's it about?"

"This guy called Richard Hannay, and this master criminal's trying to kill him because he knows too much, and they chase him —"

"What kind of car does he have?" asked Con.

"Well, it's before those days. He catches trains, and . . ."

Toula, Jimmy and Con laughed, and looked at each other.

"What does he look like, this Richard guy?" asked Toula.

"Handsome." That should be safe.

"Does he look like Ripper or the Bean?"

Marty thought. "More like Ripper."

"What colour hair does he have?" asked Toula. Jimmy and Con were listening now, and Marty felt more relaxed.

"Dark," she guessed.

"Like Ripper," said Toula, smiling. Jimmy and Con smiled too.

Marty nodded happily. It looked as if she was right.

"Well, that's funny," said Jimmy, "because Ripper's got fair hair. Like, very fair hair. You wouldn't be trying to send us up, would you, Smarty Marty?"

"I forgot," said Marty through her teeth.

"Marty's too stuck up to watch TV," said Con. "She reads books, like the teacher tells her. Why don't you tell her we don't want her rotten books, Toula?"

"I don't talk to people who tell lies, that's why," said Toula.

Now she had made everyone cross at her ... well, everyone that mattered. Marty walked slower and slower, but she could still see Con and Toula and Jimmy talking and laughing — about her, she was sure.

So she looked down at the footpath. That gave her a good idea. What if the crack in the footpath opened — and she fell into a big black hole — and the crack quietly shut

again? No more Marty!

No such luck, she thought.

She got to school as the siren went, but she still had to walk past Con and Jimmy, talking Greek with some of the other boys. Now she couldn't even guess what they were talking about.

"Smarty Marty," called Jimmy.

Marty glared, and walked away, and sat at her desk, talking to no one. She was acting as if she wanted to be different, like Jan. But it didn't work out the same way. The problem was, Jan liked being different, and Marty didn't.

In the first lesson she failed her maths test, so the teacher was cross with her too. Marty was scared. She'd had bad marks for tests before, but she had never failed.

At lunch time she sat with a group of girls, who talked about pop stars she had never seen. Marty stayed quiet. By the time they started to talk about their little brothers, her voice had gone rusty. She wanted to tell a story about Phil, but she didn't know how to start. That was the worst thing about being unhappy. It was hard to stop.

School was bad, but having to go home was worse. She had made her mother sad; she had made her sister angry; and she had made her father talk in the morning. Marty dragged her feet all the way home.

Turning the corner, she saw Toula and Con and Jimmy, sitting on the front fence and talking. All of a sudden Marty went on strike. She wasn't going to walk past them. But she couldn't let them see her running away.

She looked round and realised she was standing outside the gates of an empty factory. She knew it was empty, because she had walked past it every day for a week. Now, with one push, she was inside. She sat down on an old crate in the yard, and cried.

## CHAPTER TWO

Marty rubbed her eyes. She tried to remember what the matter had been, but she seemed to have cried it all away. She felt very tired, and leaned back against the fence.

The sky was still light, but the shape of the factory was getting darker, except where the sun made golden marks on the dusty windows. Then Marty saw another light in the middle of the row of upstairs windows — a colder light that flickered on and off.

It tugged at Marty's memory. She had seen a light like that before, but she couldn't remember where. She decided to go and see. The factory was dark inside, and she could hear soft music. She followed the music upstairs.

Then she felt a bit scared. She wanted to stay and find out, but she also wanted to give up and go home. Marty held out two fingers, one for 'Stay' and the other for 'Go Home,' and played a counting game.

*Tic tac toe.*

*Here I go.*

*Where I land,*

*I do not know.*

With the last word, she landed on 'Go Home'. Straight away Marty was sure she wanted to stay. The game always gave her an answer, one way or the other. She opened the door and took a step forward.

Marty found herself in a long high room. Paths of conveyor belts led down to silent

machines. Everything was covered in dust. The windows were high up on the walls, and grimy, so the sky looked like thunder. It was dark and cold.

At the end of the room shone the strange light. It flickered up and down like firelight, but its colour was cold like light under water. The music was louder now, sometimes crashing, sometimes singing. Marty stood and listened and forgot about going home.

She ran as fast as a mouse across the floor to the nearest conveyor belt. Then she crouched down and crawled along, holding her breath. She flattened herself against the machine at the end, and peered around, carefully, carefully.

The light sparkled like the city at night. It filled her eyes, and she shut them tight. When she looked again, she saw a dark shadow against the light. She blinked — and the shadow was a small man in an armchair, and the light was the flickering light of a big television screen.

Marty let all her breath out in a soundless laugh. Big deal. That was why she had seen the light before. The small man must be the factory caretaker, although it was a funny place to put his TV. Oh well, I might as well stay and watch a programme, thought Marty, leaning back on the machine.

It was the oddest programme she had ever seen. At first she thought it was a test pattern, then she thought it was a commercial. Picture followed picture — icy mountains, flowers opening, carnivals, huge waves, hang gliders in the sky, happy people, cars zipping round corners, beautiful houses — all there for a moment and then gone.

Somehow the music tied it all together. There were happy moments, and exciting moments, and comfortable moments. And every moment followed the other in exactly the right way. Marty couldn't take her eyes off the screen.

After a while, she forgot there was a screen. She could taste the food, touch the snow, feel the swing of the fast car. When the picture suddenly faded, she felt lost. She sat and looked at the empty screen.

Even the screen shone, like a milky opal with glints of colour under the surface. Marty put out her hand to touch it, and got a small electric shock. She patted her tingling hand — and realised that she was sitting right in front of the TV.

She looked up. The small man was smiling down at her from the armchair. Marty shook her head. She must have walked out from her hiding place and sat down by the TV. But she couldn't remember doing it.

"So, you're a TV fan?" said the small man. He had a smooth face, with smile wrinkles around his eyes, and a smooth half-bald head. He wore an old blue coverall, with "Whizz Kidd" in orange on the top pocket.

"We don't have a TV at home," said Marty. "So I don't really know."

"Oh, what a shame. Do you like my TV?"

"It's great!"

"I *am* glad."

And he looked glad, smiling till his little eyes wrinkled. Marty had to smile too.

“But let me introduce myself,” he said earnestly. “Willy Kidd’s the name — or Whizz Kidd. They called me that at school, because I was a bit of an inventor, even then. You can call me Whizz, if you like,” he ended hopefully.

Marty blinked. “Whizz” seemed a silly name for a real person. “Pleased to meet you, Mr Kidd,” she said politely. “I’m Marty Hollitt.”

Mr Kidd sighed. “Oh well, let’s talk about my TV,” he said. “You must like it, if you came all the way up from the yard to see it.”

“How did you know?”

He laughed. “I saw it on the other channel of my TV.” He looked at her mischievously, to see if she would believe him.

Marty laughed too. “That’s silly.”

“Oh, no, no, no,” said Whizz Kidd seriously. “Look at it this way. One day we’ll have telephones with TV, so you can see the person you’re talking to.”

Marty nodded. That seemed like a good idea.

“Then why not a TV that will show you the person you want to see, wherever they are?”

“But you could see them do all sorts of things,” protested Marty. “If you had a TV like that, you could have seen me —”

“Crying?” said Mr Kidd.

Marty glared. For a moment she really believed he had seen her on the TV.

“I can tell you’ve been crying,” he said gently. “Your eyes are still red. What do you want?”

“I — I don’t know.”

“Don’t be shy. You were crying because you felt sad. You felt sad because you want something.”

“Oh . . . Yeah, you’re right,” said Marty. “I do. I do want something. I want to make some friends here, and they all hate me because I can’t talk about the shows on TV. I’m *not* stuck up. It’s my parents’ fault. They don’t want TV, and I can’t talk to them about it because they keep fussing about Gran being sick.”

All her worries came pouring out. Marty felt better at once. This funny little factory caretaker was a stranger, but at least he was listening to her.

Mr Kidd was silent. Marty started to worry, in case he was cross with her too. As she looked up, he let out a big sigh.

“You poor girl,” he said. “You poor girl.” His voice sang like the TV music, and his small eyes shone mistily like the opal screen. “There are so many people, and they need so much . . . Now, what can we do to help?”

Marty loved the idea of being helped. But she was her father’s daughter. She had to make things clear.

“I don’t actually see how you can help me.”

“I have connections,” said Whizz Kidd mysteriously. “In fact, it’s part of my job. I make connections too. That’s what it’s all about.”

Marty couldn’t understand any of this. “What’s your job?” she asked. “I thought you were the caretaker of the factory.”

“Not bad,” said Mr Kidd. “Not bad at all. I like it. Yes, let’s say I’m the caretaker of the factory.”

Marty was annoyed. Either he *was* the caretaker of the factory, or he *wasn’t*. She didn’t like these grown-up riddles.

“You’re quite right,” he said. “I talk too much.”

Marty blushed. Mr Kidd had guessed what she was thinking.

“Children are sharp,” he went on. “You don’t want to hear all about me. You want to see the product.”

“The product?” said Marty.

“One of the things I make,” explained Mr Kidd. “I make games. Games to make people happy. It always helps people when they play my games.”

“Oh,” said Marty. She was disappointed. For a moment she had thought that Mr Kidd really would help her. But he just wanted to show her a silly game he had made. Her father made up good games too. They were fun, but they were no help.

Mr Kidd was trotting over to one of the machines. Marty followed slowly. She would look at the game, then she would go home. It must be late.

“Here it is,” said Mr Kidd proudly. He stopped in front of a machine covered with a dust sheet.

“I should go,” said Marty, hanging back.

“Yes, yes, yes. Just a minute,” said Mr Kidd.

He pulled off the sheet. Marty saw something like a giant pinball machine, bright red and yellow, with flashing lights at the top. The board was painted with cartoons of people and buildings. At the end of the board was a blank TV screen.

“Pull the lever,” said Mr Kidd.

Marty did. Instead of a pinball, out shot a whirling figure. When it stopped, she could see it was a tiny model of a girl in jeans with short curly hair.

It’s me, thought Marty. It’s a model of me!

“There you are, then,” said Mr Kidd. “Whizz Kidd’s Amazing Game Machine. Do you want to play a game on it?”

“What sort of game is it?” said Marty.

“It’s a game with prizes,” said Mr Kidd. He patted the machine fondly. “It’s a *little* bit like a pinball machine. But in pinball, you try to stop the ball running down the board. In the Amazing Game Machine, you try to send the doll running up the board. When the doll goes into the TV screen at the end, you win a prize.”

“Why does the doll look like me?” asked Marty.

“Because the Amazing Game Machine wants you to play with it,” said Mr Kidd. He patted the machine again. “Will you?”

“Well. . .” said Marty. “What are the prizes?”

“Anything you want,” said Mr Kidd. “Well, anything I can give you. It’s like this. I could give you a friend, but I couldn’t make the kids at school be your friends. I could give you a happy smile, but I couldn’t make you be happy. But I can give you any *thing* that you want.”

“Wow,” said Marty. “How many prizes can I win?”

“I want you to have the prize that is best for you,” said Mr Kidd earnestly. He looked hard at her, with his pale opal eyes. “So, if you don’t like a prize, you can bring it back, and try for another prize.”

“Hey, that’s really good.”

“Well, you can’t return your prizes forever, of course. But these days we like to give people more than one chance. How about it, Marty? Do you want to play?”

“Well,” said Marty, “I’m not sure what I want most. I’d like to think about it, please.”

“Of course,” said Mr Kidd, waving his hand. “Have all the time you like. Time doesn’t cost anything.” He laughed.

“Can I come back?”

“Of course,” said Mr Kidd again. “I’m always here. Goodbye for now.”

At the door Marty turned and looked back at the flickering light of the TV and the dark shadow of Mr Kidd in his armchair. He was real! He was going to help her! Marty skipped all the way down the street.

At home, Phil was cooking, so tea was spaghetti with meat sauce from a can. Phil was walking round the table, saying, “A bit more for Jan. A bit more for me. A bit less for Mum.”

“Here, I’ll do it,” said Jan. “I’ll be quicker.”

“No,” said Phil, grabbing the saucepan back. “It has to be even.”

“You made the list,” said Mr Hollitt to Jan. “So you have to let Phil do things his own way.”

“Okay,” said Jan. She was logical too, like Mr Hollitt. But she wasn’t very patient. She sat and sighed as Phil counted the forks three times.

“Sorry I’m late,” said Marty. She sat down, and they started to eat. Mrs Hollitt told them about their grandmother. She was still very sick. Jan told them about her geography essay. Phil told them how good the spaghetti was.

Marty kept thinking about Mr Kidd. But somehow she didn’t want to tell her family about him. So she was silent.

After tea, Jan and Phil went to do their homework, and Marty put the plates into the

dishwasher. Then she went past the lounge to her bedroom.

“Marty,” called Mr Hollitt. She went into the lounge.

“Marty,” said Mrs Hollitt, “do you want to talk to us about not having a TV?”

“Oh,” said Marty. She had forgotten how sad she had been that morning.

“You really feel bad because we don’t have TV?” said Mr Hollitt.

Marty didn’t feel bad any more. She had Mr Kidd on her side. “Well, sort of,” she said.

“We should tell you again why we don’t have TV,” said Mrs Hollitt. “When we lived in England, we liked TV. But when we came to Australia, the TV only showed old movies and cops and robbers and lots and lots of advertisements, so we didn’t get a TV here.”

“Well, I can’t watch English TV in Australia,” said Marty crossly.

Mr Hollitt laughed. “Sorry,” he said. “You’re right, of course. But Marty, why do you suddenly want TV now?”

Marty thought. “I s’pose ... At my other school I knew all the kids, and I saw TV at their places, and they didn’t think I was strange. But here I don’t know anyone, and they all talk about TV, so the first thing they know about me is that I don’t have TV. I feel —”

The phone rang. Blow it, thought Marty, as Mrs Hollitt went to answer it.

“Go on, Marty,” said Mr Hollitt. But he was listening to Mrs Hollitt on the phone too. Marty didn’t feel like going on.

Then Mrs Hollitt came back. “She’s been taken to hospital,” she said. “Could you drive me there, Jack? My hands are shaking.”

Mr Hollitt jumped up. “Right away,” he said. Then he remembered Marty. “We’ll finish our talk later,” he said, and hugged her. Then they went.

Marty did her homework and went to bed, but she couldn’t sleep. It wasn’t fair. Everyone hugged her, but no one talked to her. She kept hearing Phil’s silly song.

*No one ever listens in this family.*

Marty knew from books that you should feel sad when your grandmother was in hospital. But she couldn’t feel sad. Gran was different these days. She didn’t talk, or she talked nonsense. And she just lay in bed all the time. She wasn’t really Gran any more.

But her mother was sad about Gran, so Marty should be sad too. There must be something wrong with her.

I don’t care, said Marty to herself as she fell asleep. I don’t care, she said when she woke up. She saw Con and Jimmy and Toulia on the way to school, and she crossed to the other side of the road.

“Smarty Marty,” called Jimmy.

“I don’t care,” said Marty to herself.

At school all the kids were swapping transfer tattoos. One of the girls came up to Marty.

“Have you got any tats?” she asked. “I’ve got two star tattoos — I’ll swap you one.”

“Where do you get them from?” asked Marty.

The girl stared. “Haven’t you seen them on TV?”

“We don’t have TV,” said Marty in a tight little voice.

“Ooh, aren’t we posh?” said the girl, and ran away.

“I don’t care,” said Marty again, but she didn’t believe it. She wanted most in the world to swap transfers with the girl.

Suddenly she knew what she could ask Mr Kidd for. She almost ran out of the school gate, but she made herself stay. She could see Mr Kidd at lunchtime, after all.

## CHAPTER THREE

Mr Kidd was in front of his television again, watching some sort of documentary programme. Marty saw shiny silver factories, process lines piled high with stacks of coloured boxes, workers in bright blue overalls. Mr Kidd was smiling happily, but he turned off the TV as Marty came up.

“Can I help you?” he asked brightly.

Marty laughed. “You sound like someone in a shop.”

“The Amazing Game Machine is *much* better than a shop,” said Mr Kidd.

He looked hurt, so Marty didn’t laugh again. Anyway, he was right. She wanted him to help her. She just didn’t know how to ask.

“Come on, tell Whizz Kidd what you want,” said Mr Kidd. “Don’t be frightened. As I always say, I’m just a big kid at heart.”

Mr Kidd laughed like mad at his own joke, and Marty smiled politely. She didn’t think the joke was that funny. But then Mr Kidd smiled at her kindly with his strange milky eyes, and she began to tell him about her idea.

“Well, the thing is — the kids at school were swapping transfer tattoos today, and I thought that maybe if I had something really special to swap . . . Would the Game Machine have something like that in it?”

“Nothing easier,” said Mr Kidd, rubbing his hands. “A very good idea, Marty. Now, why don’t you watch my TV while I go and set up the Game Machine? You’ll like that.”

So Marty settled down in Mr Kidd’s armchair. The programme began.

Marty saw a girl on a crowded bus. She opened a can of lemonade, and tiny lemons

shot out all over the bus. All the grumpy people started to laugh. Then she saw two kids eating a white icypole. Silver stars danced on the icypole, and every time the kids bit it, they smiled.

A woman poured cornflakes into a blue bowl. Then she poured on the milk, and all the cornflakes jumped up and down and sang a little song. Next, a boy sat in the bush and opened a packet of stripy biscuits. A rainbow grew out of the biscuits and up into the sky. Marty gasped.

“How do you like it?” asked Mr Kidd from behind her.

“It’s like the commercials, isn’t it?” said Marty. “But it’s different. There aren’t any voices saying, ‘Buy this.’ So it’s like a story without a story, if you see what I mean.”

“Yes, I do. You’re a very clever girl. Now, look. This is my favourite bit.”

The girl, the kids, the woman, the boy and lots of other people were crowding into a huge theatre. Into a circle of light on the stage stepped a magician. He took off his tall black hat and tapped it with his wand. Out flew the lemonade, the icypoles, the cornflakes, the biscuits — into the hands of the girl, the kids, the woman and the boy.

Everyone smiled, but the magician smiled most of all, because he had made everyone happy. Then the TV went blank.

“Ohhh,” said Marty, disappointed. She looked up at Mr Kidd. He was smiling as hard as the magician.

“Would you like a hat like that?” he said.

Marty nodded. She got up and went without a word to the Amazing Game Machine. It flashed and hummed and sparkled. On the TV screen at the end of the board was a picture of the magician’s hat. Marty put her hands on the control buttons but Mr Kidd moved her away.

“I’m sorry, Marty, but first you have to sign this piece of paper to say that you know the rules of the game. There’s one rule I haven’t told you. If you lose, you have to work for me after school for a while, heart and soul. But that wouldn’t be hard, for a clever girl like you.”

Marty took the biro, but she paused for a moment. “My father says that you have to read things before you put your name on them.”

“Certainly,” said Mr Kidd. “The customer is always right.”

Marty started to read. “A contract is hereinafter to be drawn up, compounded and entered into between two consenting parties, to wit, the game player, Martine Hollitt, and the game owner, William Kidd . . .”

“Yuk,” she said. “I can’t understand all those long words. I’ll just sign it.”

She wrote her name in big letters at the bottom. Then she felt scared. She could have taken the paper home and asked her father to read it. But she didn’t want to tell her family about Mr Kidd. And she wanted to have the magician’s hat straight away.

“Now can I play the game?” said Marty.

“Of course,” said Mr Kidd.

The lights on the Amazing Game Machine flashed a big “Hello”. Mr Kidd showed her how to press the right hand button, to send the Marty doll up the board, or the left hand button, to send the Marty doll down the board.

Then he pulled a lever. The Marty doll bounced out.

“Right-oh,” said Mr Kidd. “She’s away!”

The doll shot up the board towards the TV screen. It hit a knob on the board and bounced back. But Marty pressed the right button, and a lever hit the doll up the board again. Then she pressed the left button by mistake. Wrong! Quickly she pressed the right button again and saved the doll.

Marty kept pressing hard on the right button. It wasn’t easy. She had to keep pressing the button in time. And once she had to press the left button, to steer the doll away from one of the knobs. But at last the Marty doll shot through the end of the board into the TV screen. There was the hat, with a little Marty standing beside it.

“Well done, well done,” said Mr Kidd, shaking her hand vigorously.

Marty relaxed. “Phew. You really have to try hard.”

“I knew you could do it,” said Mr Kidd. “And now for your prize.” He put his hand into the TV screen and pulled out the hat.

“Hey,” said Marty. “How do you do that?”

“What?”

“You put your hand through the screen.”

“Well,” said Mr Kidd, “that’s what a screen is for, isn’t it? You put a fire screen in front of a fire. You put a fly screen in front of a fly. So a TV screen must be in front of something. Of course, it takes a Whizz Kidd to get behind a TV screen. But here you are.”

He held out the hat to Marty. It was black and silky, a very special hat. Mr Kidd showed her how she could fold it up flat, and then flick it out again.

“Can I take something out of it while I’m here, please?” said Marty.

“Well, just once,” said Mr Kidd. “I don’t want a lot of mess around the place.”

He took the wand out of a long side pocket in his overalls, and gave it to Marty. She tapped the hat. It jumped in her hand, and a fat cigar flew into Mr Kidd’s mouth. Then a lighted match flew after it.

“Not a bad little hat,” said Mr Kidd, puffing away on his cigar. “It always produces the right thing for the right market.”

Marty knew that Mr Kidd wanted her to go. But she needed to ask one more question.

“Mr Kidd, I wondered . . . Well, are you magic? I mean, the hat and the TV and . . .

“Magic?” said Mr Kidd. He opened his pale eyes wide. “In a way. I remember when I invented the wheel — Kidd’s Amazing Game Wheel, that is. Everyone said it was just

like magic.”

“Oh, that’s not the same,” said Marty.

“No, it’s not the same. You see, science is just like magic, to people who don’t understand. A plane would be magic to Captain Cook, but to you it’s science.”

“I see,” said Marty. “But I know about planes. I don’t know how all those things come out of my hat.”

“Of course you don’t,” said Mr Kidd laughing. “That hat seems like magic to you, but to a Whizz Kidd it’s science!”

“I see,” said Marty again.

It was a lie. She didn’t see at all. But then she wouldn’t be able to tell Captain Cook how a plane worked, either. She just knew it did. Besides, thought Marty, I want the hat, and I’m scared of magic. So it better be science.

“Thank you very much,” she said. “Goodbye.”

Mr Kidd waved goodbye with his cigar. Marty ran. In the yard she folded up the hat into a flat black circle and hid it under her shirt. Then she pushed the wand down her jeans and limped off to school.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Marty got back to school just in time. In the playground she saw the girl who had asked her to swap the tattoos.

“Hey!” yelled Marty.

“Hey to you,” said the girl, but she walked over to Marty. “What do you want?”

“I’ve got some tattoos now,” said Marty. “I’ll swap you after school, if you like.”

“I don’t know,” said the girl. “Oh well, okay. Meet you behind the shed then. Hey, what’s your name?”

“Marty.”

“I’m Effie. See you.”

Marty walked into class grinning. Toula grinned back. Marty’s grin nearly ran away in fright, but she stopped it.

“You look like you’ve been given a million dollars,” said Toula.

“No, but I got these great tats from a friend. Want to come and see them after school?”

“I might,” said Toula and Marty felt truly happy.

Lessons seemed to be over in a flash. After school Marty called out to Toula, “Meet me at the shed,” and ran to find Effie. Effie had two young kids with her.

“Sorry,” she said. “It’s my little brother and sister. He’s Arthur and she’s Patroula. I’m supposed to take them home from school”

“You walk funny,” said Arthur to Marty.

“Oops,” said Marty. She pulled the wand out of her jeans leg and the hat from under

her shirt. Arthur laughed and Patroula clapped. Marty bowed to them.

“Well, where’s the tattoos?” said Effie.

Marty wanted to wait for Toula. But maybe she had gone home. She unfolded the hat and tapped it with the wand.

Nothing happened.

“Well?” said Effie again. Marty said nothing. Oh, Mr Kidd! she thought.

Then Patroula squealed, “Look!” and pointed at Effie’s arm. There was a skull tattoo. As they watched, the skull slowly winked at them.

“Good one,” said Effie. She turned her arm this way and that, admiring the skull. “It winks when I move. Here, I’ll give you my star tattoo for swaps.”

She showed Marty how to stick the tattoo on. Then Toula arrived, with Jimmy and Con, and Effie ran off to show them her skull. They all seemed to know each other, and Marty started to feel left out again.

But this time she knew what to do. She tapped the hat with the wand.

“Con,” she called. “Do you want a tattoo?”

Con looked around. “Sure. Where is it?”

“On your arm!” shouted Arthur.

Con looked down. There was a snake tattoo, its tongue moving in and out. Con jumped. He tried to brush it off, then stopped and smiled.

“Wow! How do you do it?”

“Me too. Me too,” yelled Patroula and Arthur.

So Marty gave them all transfer tattoos that moved. And she didn’t answer Con’s question.

“What else can you do?” asked Patroula.

Marty smiled. “What else do you want?”

“I’m hungry.”

“Patroula!” said Effie. “Don’t be greedy.”

But Marty tapped the hat. Out flew a bowl of cornflakes, into Patroula’s hands. Everyone was silent. They looked scared. Tattoos were okay, but how did cornflakes and milk come out of the hat? Then, in the silence, the cornflakes started to sing, just like the cornflakes on Mr Kidd’s TV.

“Oh, listen!” said Toula. “Aren’t they lovely?” She grabbed the bowl from Patroula. “You can’t eat them. That would be cruel.”

She walked away a bit, sat down on the grass and listened to the cornflakes singing.

“Okay, give me an icy pole,” said Patroula.

So Marty tapped the hat, and out flew one of the white icy poles with a star on top. Patroula bit it, and all at once she had a big smile on her face, like the TV kids.

“Do you like it?” asked Marty.

“I don’t know,” said Patroula.

But she still had the big smile on her face, so all the others wanted icy poles too. They stood around her in a circle, all with icy poles and all with big smiles. It was a bit strange, but Marty felt good. Now she knew how Mr Kidd must feel. She could make the kids smile, and she could give them anything they wanted.

She tapped the hat and a can of lemonade flew out. Con opened it, and the little lemons hit him in the face. Everyone laughed, Jimmy most of all.

“Give me another can,” shouted Con. He pointed the second can at Jimmy and opened it. The little lemons hit Jimmy in the face, and everyone laughed again.

“Give *me* a can,” said Jimmy to Marty.

Then the fight was on. Jimmy shot lemons at Con, but hit Effie instead. So Effie shot him, and Patroula shot him too. Marty was playing drums on the hat, making can after can of lemonade. Lemons flew in all directions. The ground turned into lemonade sticky mud.

Then one of the lemons hit Toula.

“Stop it,” she yelled. “You’ll hurt my cornflakes.”

They all stopped. But Con was running at Jimmy, and stopped too suddenly. He slipped in the mud, and fell on Arthur. Arthur sat on his icy pole, and started to cry.

“Never mind,” said Marty. “I’ll give you another icy pole.”

“He gets sick easily,” said Effie. “Better give him an orange juice or something.”

Marty tapped the hat. Arthur took a mouthful of orange juice. His cheeks blew out and his eyes opened wide. Then he started to cry again.

Jimmy took the orange juice from him. “The Taste Sensation that Explodes in Your Mouth,” he read from the label, and laughed.

“Oh, poor Arthur,” said Marty.

She thought for a moment, then remembered the rainbow biscuits on Mr Kidd’s TV. Arthur liked the rainbow, but he liked the biscuits even better. Now all the others wanted to make rainbows too. Jimmy and Con and Effie piled up six packets of biscuits, and made a thirty-six stripe rainbow. It shone with a blinding light.

“Sunglasses, Marty, please,” said Effie.

Marty produced seven pairs of round rose-coloured glasses. They put them on, and suddenly everything looked beautiful. Marty gave them bubble gum that blew metre long bubbles, and milk that made the muscles on their arms bounce up and down. They all laughed and ate and threw away the food half-eaten and tapped the hat again.

Only Toula didn’t want anything. She lay on the grass and listened to her cornflakes. Jimmy wanted a cigarette. He got a horse as well and had to ride round the playground like a cowboy.

Arthur wanted everything. Then he was sick.

“I *told* you that would happen,” said Effie to Marty. She pulled off the rose-coloured glasses, and grabbed Arthur and Patroula. “We’re going home.”

Arthur and Patroula grumbled. "I like her better than you," Arthur told Effie, and Patroula gave Marty a sticky kiss. But Effie grabbed their hands and led them away. At the corner of the shed she turned and yelled, "Thanks for the tatt, Marty."

But Marty still felt miserable. It was her party, and it was all going wrong. She took off her glasses and rubbed her eyes. Then she looked over at Jimmy. He was still bumping around the playground on the horse, with the cigarette poking out of his mouth.

"Hey, I think Jimmy's stuck."

Con took off his glasses. "You're right. Come and help him."

They ran at the horse, but the horse ran faster. It frisked away from them around the yard. Jimmy couldn't speak, but he puffed big smoke signals at them, asking for help.

"It's too fast for us," yelled Con. "I know. Wait here."

Con and Marty stopped still. The horse galloped up to them. Con jumped at the reins. But the horse tossed up its head, and he missed. The horse galloped on.

"It's laughing," said Marty in disgust. "We need more help. Oh — the hat!"

"It turned Jimmy into a cowboy — because of the cigarette," panted Con. "We need a lasso."

"Great," said Marty. She tapped the hat, and out whipped a lasso. The next minute the horse was gone, and Jimmy was sitting on the ground, gasping for breath and pulling off the lasso. He spat out the cigarette.

"Oh, yuk," he said. "I just wanted to try a cigarette once. That's it. Never again." He made a face. "I think I'd better go home."

"Me too," said Toula sadly. "My cornflakes have gone soggy. They won't sing any more. Thanks, Marty."

"Yeah, thanks," said Con.

"Mm," said Jimmy with his mouth shut tight.

They walked away slowly, looking as sick as Arthur. Marty felt tired. She leaned against the shed for a moment. That was stupid, she thought. I had to do things for them all the time, so I never got to talk to them.

She turned around to pick up the hat. The ground was covered with rubbish. Stars twinkled on melting icy poles. Pink bubble gum shot up out of piles of soggy biscuits, and tiny lemons still bounced in puddles of milk. The huge rainbow shone down on a sticky glittering mess.

Marty suddenly felt sick too. She grabbed the hat and wand, and ran for home.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Marty stood on a hill. But it wasn't an ordinary hill; it was a volcano. Suddenly, it erupted. Out of its top poured thick rivers of sparkling, melted sweets. They rolled down the hill towards Marty.

She woke up, pushing the sheets away, and sat up and looked around.

"Phew!" she said to herself. "It was a dream."

But she couldn't go to sleep again. At last she decided to go to school early and clean up the mess. She left a note on the kitchen table and went out.

The sky was light, but with a pale, secret light. The sandstone houses were asleep in their green gardens. The air was still and silent. There was no one about, except for a few cars, and a big blue van parked outside the school.

Marty was planning to climb over the school fence. But behind the shed she saw two men in blue overalls, shovelling the rubbish into big plastic bags.

Oh dear, she thought. Someone saw the mess.

Then one of the men turned round. On the pocket of his overalls were two words — WHIZZ KIDD. Marty walked on. Sure enough, the side of the van said WHIZZ KIDD REMOVALS. She decided to go and see Mr Kidd.

The factory looked even more bare and dusty in the morning light. But Mr Kidd was sitting in his comfortable armchair, eating a bowl of singing cornflakes.

"Hello, Marty," he said. "So you didn't like my hat?"

"It was good at first," said Marty. "But then it made a mess, and everyone got sick."

"Aha!" said Mr Kidd. "You know where you went wrong? You gave them too much."

That's just as bad as not giving them enough. You should have given them tattoos today and lemonade tomorrow, and so on. Then you build up a demand." He beamed at her.

"Hmm ..." Marty frowned.

"Why don't you try again with some other kids?"

"No!" she said loudly. "No. I want to be friends with Toula and Jimmy and Effie and Con, not some other kids. Besides ... I want them to like *me*, not the presents I give them." She looked at Mr Kidd to see what he thought.

"An excellent idea. Trust Whizz Kidd to help you. We'll think of something to make them like you for yourself. Now — how about breakfast?"

"Yes, please, I'd love some." Then Marty remembered Toula listening to the singing cornflakes. "But not cornflakes, please," she said.

Mr Kidd turned on the TV. On a huge table muffins danced, cornflakes sang, tea bags jiggled.

"How about a Toasty Cheese Snack?" he asked.

Marty nodded. Mr Kidd could have been cross with her because she didn't like his hat, but instead he gave her breakfast. That proved he was a nice man. He played the Amazing Game Machine and came back with two Toasty Cheese Snacks. Then they watched TV together, until Marty had to go to school.

"I'll see you soon," said Mr Kidd. "I know you'll have a good idea."

Outside the classroom Con and Effie were showing off their tattoos to their friends. One of the boys turned to Marty and waved.

"Great tats," he said.

Marty pulled up her shirt sleeve. "Look, I've still got my star," she said to Effie. Then there was nothing more to say, so she went into the classroom.

"Jimmy's away," Toula told her. "He was sick all night." She made a noise like Jimmy being sick, and grinned. Marty went and hid behind the lid of her desk. It's all my fault, she thought. Toula came over.

"It's all his own fault," she said. "He ate too much — and then that horse!"

She laughed, but Marty couldn't laugh. When your grandmother was sick, you didn't want to make other people sick.

Toula put her hand on Marty's shoulder. "I liked the little cornflakes," she whispered. Then she ran back to her desk. Marty smiled a bit.

At lunchtime Toula and Effie sat with their friends but Marty didn't mind so much now. At least they talked to her. Maybe they would be her friends in the end.

It seemed as if she was right. After school, Effie came up to her.

"Marty, it's my birthday this week. Do you want to come to my party on Saturday? It's a picnic by the river."

"Thanks. I'd really like to," said Marty happily.

But Effie went on standing there. "Marty," she said, "have you got a dress or

something? Not those old jeans?"

Marty stopped smiling. "What's wrong with my jeans?"

"Well, they're a bit scruffy for a party and that. They make you look like a boy." Effie looked embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Marty. My mum would have a fit if she saw one of my friends dressed like that. I hope you can come, anyway." She ran off to Arthur and Patroula.

All the way home Marty bubbled with anger, like the volcano in her dream. Scruffy! Like a boy! She would wear what she liked. Who wanted to go to Effie's rotten party anyway?

In the kitchen Jan was making a peanut butter and beetroot sandwich. Marty told her all about it.

"What would you do?" she said.

Jan chewed her sandwich and thought. "This tastes awful," she said. "Well, all the Greek-Australian kids dress pretty well. If you dress differently, they might think you don't want to be friends with them."

"Huh? What's greekaustralian?" said Marty.

Jan looked pleased. She liked to tell people about new ideas. "That's what Miss Reilly says. She says you can't call people Greek when they live in Australia. So Effie's family is Greek-Australian, and we're Anglo-Australian, because Mum and Dad come from England. Nifty, eh?"

"I never thought of that before," said Marty frowning.

"Well, all the kids you like seem to be Greek-Australian. So you'd better start to think about it."

"But does that mean I have to do everything the way they do? I'd look stupid in flowery skirts."

"Don't be silly," said Jan impatiently. "But you can't expect Effie to be the same as you, either."

Marty sighed. "I want to be friends. I just wish there was something else I could do."

"Miss Reilly's starting a Greek class. You could learn Greek." Jan looked surprised at herself. "Hey, that's actually a good idea."

"Yeah, it is. I'll do that. But it doesn't help about the party."

"Ask mum. She likes clothes. I don't." Jan wore her old school uniform everywhere.

"Mum doesn't listen," said Marty sadly.

"She's worried about Gran. But try."

"Okay."

Marty went to her room and thought. She wanted Toulia and Effie to like her - and she didn't really want to wear jeans to the party - but she didn't want Effie to boss her around - and she certainly didn't want to wear a flowery skirt. What was she going to do?

Marty waited for her mother after tea but she had to go to the hospital again.

“We’ll talk about it later,” she said.

“Later. Later. Later,” said Marty bitterly. She wanted some help now.

Help, she thought. Mr Kidd ...

“Dad,” she yelled. “Can I go and see a friend down the road for half an hour?”

She heard Mr Hollitt say, “What?” Then she ran.

## CHAPTER SIX

Marty burst into the factory. "Mr Kidd, Mr Kidd," she shouted. "I want to play the Amazing Game Machine."

Mr Kidd looked hard at her. "You're very unhappy tonight," he said. "How can I help you?"

Marty told him at top speed about Effie, the party, the jeans. He nodded.

"You want to wear jeans, but you want to look good," he said. "That seems hard to you, but it seems easy to a Whizz Kidd. I know just the programme."

He changed the channel on the TV. Women in long dresses got out of big cars, and men in black suits smiled at them.

"Oops! Wrong channel for you at the moment," laughed Mr Kidd. He changed the channel again.

Marty saw girls in t-shirts and jeans, with gleaming hair and shining teeth; girls in overalls, with gleaming hair and shining teeth; girls in big shirts, with gleaming hair and shining teeth. Boys followed them everywhere and looked lovingly at them.

"Well, Marty?" said Mr Kidd. "What's the secret of their success? What do they look like?"

"They look beautiful," said Marty. "But they dress like me." Mr Kidd waited. "They all have very white teeth. And they all have lovely long hair."

"Right!" said Mr Kidd. He stood up and held out his hand. "Well, Marty Hollitt. Do you want to play the Amazing Game Machine, for gleaming hair and shining teeth?"

"Oh, please!" said Marty.

She ran straight to the Game Machine. She would be beautiful too! The game was

easy. The Marty doll shot quickly into the TV screen at the end of the board. Mr Kidd put his hand through the screen and pulled out a pile of gleaming hair and a tube of toothpaste.

“Put the hair on your head, and brush your teeth with the toothpaste,” he said. “I guarantee the results. Boys will think you are beautiful.”

“Oh, thank you,” cried Marty.

“No, no, no. Making people happy is my business.”

Mr Kidd smiled and waved goodbye. Marty ran home. She wanted to try the hair and teeth at once, but her father was waiting at the door.

“Where have you been?” he said.

“I told you. I went to see a friend.”

“Well, now you can go to bed. Next time, come and tell me. Don’t just shout down the hall.”

Marty went to her room. She sat in front of the mirror and looked at the hair. Then she heard her father walking down the hall. Quickly she turned out the light and jumped into bed.

Next morning she woke up, feeling as excited as if it were Christmas Day. Then she remembered her prize. She still wanted to try the wonderful hair and teeth. But she didn’t want her family to see her.

So once again Marty went to school early. She went into the girls’ washrooms and looked in the mirror.

“Goodbye, scruffy Marty,” she said.

Then she took out the wonderful hair from her school bag, and put it on top of her head. It gave a little wriggle and then it grew long and fluffed out and fitted round her head. Now Marty had long gleaming hair.

She took out her toothbrush and brushed her teeth with the wonderful toothpaste. Her teeth moved up and down in her gums. Marty spat out the frothy toothpaste and looked in the mirror. Her teeth were big and straight, and they shone like stars.

“Hello, beautiful Marty.”

Marty went out and sat in the empty playground, waiting for Effie. She hoped Effie would like her new hair. A few kids arrived, but no one said hello to her.

Wow, thought Marty. I look so different they don’t know who I am. She laughed to herself.

Marty waited to see if anyone would recognise her, but no one did. Then Jimmy came in the gate. *He’ll know it’s me*, thought Marty.

“Hi, Jimmy,” she said.

But Jimmy didn’t say anything. He just looked at her. Marty smiled. Her white teeth flashed, and her gleaming hair waved in the wind. She couldn’t think of anything to say either.

“Are you better today?” she said at last.

Jimmy smiled at her, a big smile, like the boys on Mr Kidd’s TV. But he didn’t say anything. Then Con came up.

“Hi, Con,” said Marty. “Is Jimmy okay?”

Con just looked at her and smiled too.

“Oh no,” said Marty “This is silly. Say something.”

They smiled again. Then Luce came up, and John and Nick and Jack, and other boys Marty didn’t know. They all looked at her in the same way.

“Okay,” said Marty, “what’s the big deal? Why are you all staring at me?”

All the boys gave a big sigh, and stared even harder. Marty stamped her foot.

“Stop sending me up!” she said.

Then she remembered. She was beautiful now! That was why the boys were staring.

“Oh dear,” said Marty and stuck her hands in her jeans pockets. She always did that when she wanted to think. Then she felt a soft feathery touch on her wrists. With a sharp tug, it pulled her hands out of her pockets.

Wow, thought Marty. The hair doesn’t like me putting my hands in my pockets. I guess that’s not a beautiful thing to do.

She looked at the boys again. They looked back admiringly. They seemed quite happy to stand and stare, but Marty was bored by now.

Then she saw Effie at the gate. She ran over to her.

“Effie ...”

“Huh?” said Effie. “Who are you?”

Oh no, thought Marty. It really is true. No one knows who I am.

She wanted to say, “I’m Marty.” But suddenly all the boys were round her again, standing and staring. Marty felt silly. She could not speak, and Effie walked off, with a sniff.

“This is no good,” said Marty.

She wanted Effie to like her, and Effie was walking away. She wanted Jimmy and Con to like her too, but she didn’t want them to follow her, and stare at her, and say nothing. She was tired of all the staring, so she walked over to the tree where the girls sat. All the boys followed her, and all the girls looked cross.

Marty walked away again, and the boys walked with her. So Marty ran. The boys ran too. She stopped. They stopped beside her. She climbed up on the jungle gym, and they climbed up beside her and stared at her again.

“Why don’t you all get lost?” she said and they smiled some more.

Marty wanted to go to the girls’ washroom and take off the hair. But she was scared. What if the boys followed her into the washroom?

She looked around for help. On the other side of the playground Toulou and Effie were talking together. They looked crossly at Marty but Marty didn’t mind. She knew she

would feel cross if Jan or Phil stared at someone all the time. Now she was glad that no one knew who she was.

Marty let go of the jungle gym and dropped to the ground. The boys dropped down around her. Then Toula and Effie marched up.

“What are you doing, Jimmy?” asked Toula.

“Come and talk to us,” said Effie.

But Jimmy and Con went on staring.

“Come *on*,” said Toula. She put her hand on Jimmy’s arm. He pushed her away. “Don’t do that,” she said.

She grabbed Jimmy, and Effie grabbed Con. They pulled hard, but Jimmy and Con pulled back, still staring at Marty.

Marty was barracking for the two girls. “Come on, Toula. Come on, Effie,” she whispered.

Then her hair started to move. A long lock shot out, like an octopus’s arm. It wound around Jimmy, and pulled him away from Toula. Then another lock of hair pulled Con back. They stood beside Marty, smiling away. Toula and Effie looked puzzled.

“Leave them alone,” said Effie.

Marty’s lips twitched. Her mouth opened in a smile. A bright white light flashed from her shining teeth and beamed into Toula and Effie’s eyes. They put their hands over their eyes, blinded by the light.

“Stop it,” said Toula. “Please.”

Oh no, thought Marty. She tried to shut her mouth, but she couldn’t. Her teeth shone like a lighthouse. Toula and Effie couldn’t see. They stumbled away to the other side of the playground, rubbing their eyes.

Then the siren went. It was time for school. Marty held her breath. Maybe the boys would follow her into class . . . But, with one last look, they went to their own classrooms.

“Phew!” said Marty. She ran to the girls’ washroom and pulled at the hair. It hurt, but she pulled harder and harder. At last she had a bundle of gleaming hair in her hand. She dropped it into the toilet, and pressed the button. The hair swirled round in gleaming circles, and was gone.

“Good riddance,” said Marty.

But her teeth were still shining. She rinsed her mouth out again and again. At last she looked into the mirror and saw her small ordinary teeth.

“Welcome back, scruffy Marty,” said Marty with relief, and ran into class.

At recess one of the boys came up to her. “Where’s that girl?” he said.

“What girl?” said Marty. “Why ask me?”

“I don’t know,” he said, surprised. “I just thought . . . Oh, forget it.”

“What did Luce want?” asked Toula.

“Nothing,” said Marty firmly. “Hey, I have to see Miss Reilly now.”

“Why? Are you in trouble for being late?”

“No, I want to join the Greek class.”

“Yeah?” Toula looked unbelievably at Marty. “Is that really true? Why?”

“So I can understand what you lot say about me,” said Marty, and laughed. Toula looked at her for a moment, and laughed too. “No, I just want to.”

“I’m doing Greek too,” said Toula. “I can’t write it too well, and I want to remember it. I could help you, if you like.”

“Oh, yes, please.”

“Well, go and see Miss Reilly then.” Toula gave her a friendly push, and Marty ran off. Jimmy was standing around with some of the other boys.

“Hi, Smarty Marty,” he called out, and waved.

“Same to you,” yelled Marty, and ran on. She grinned to herself. Making jokes was more fun than being stared at.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Marty walked home with Toula, Jimmy and Con, and they taught her the Greek words for 'girl', 'boy', 'hello' and 'goodbye'. She got home later than usual. Mrs Hollitt was in the kitchen.

"*Yasu*, mum," said Marty.

"Same to you," said Mrs Hollitt. "Come on, slowcoach. Luckily it's late night shopping tonight ... or have you forgotten?"

Marty had forgotten Effie's party altogether. Now her stomach jumped. She hated trying on clothes.

"Maybe I could wear that red dress?"

"It's too small," her mother said firmly. "Don't worry. I've got a few ideas. Now, tell me about this party."

In the car on the way to town Marty told Mrs Hollitt about Effie and Toula and Con and Jimmy. It felt good to be talking to her mother again.

"No, we won't buy a dress for you," said Mrs Hollitt. "You don't look good in dresses."

Marty started to be interested. "What will we buy?"

"Wait and see ... What else can you do about Toula and the others?"

"Jan said to join the Greek class. So I did." Marty remembered that she hadn't told her parents. "Is that okay?"

"Jan always has good ideas." Her mother looked sad for a moment. "I wish I'd thought of it for you."

They parked the car and went to one of the big stores.

"I came here yesterday in my lunch hour," said Mrs Hollitt, "and I found this."

It was a cream pants suit, with big pockets and brown buttons. Marty tried it on and kicked her legs up at the mirror. "Beaut," she said. "I really like it."

She gave her mother a big hug, and her mother hugged her back. "Now, shoes," she said.

They bought shiny brown shoes, had a milkshake and went back to the car.

"Thanks, mum," said Marty. "You have good ideas too."

"Thanks," said Mrs Hollitt. "I haven't had many good ideas about you lately, Marty. I have to spend a lot of time with Gran. I hope you don't mind too much."

"That's all right," said Marty. "She's sick, and she's your mother. I'd look after you if you were sick."

All of a sudden she felt better. What she had just said was true. Gran was Marty's grandmother, but she was Mrs Hollitt's mother. Of course that was different.

But her mother still looked sad. "Gran's very sick," she said. "She may die soon."

"Oh," said Marty. She didn't know what to say. Her family wasn't supposed to die.

Mrs Hollitt sighed. "Never mind, Marty. I'm worried, but you don't have to be worried too."

Marty didn't want to worry. She was already worried about school and friends and Mr Kidd. "All right," she said. "If that's okay."

Her mother smiled. "Of course it's okay, pet. Now, here we are. Let's show your pants suit to the others."

Marty's family liked the pants suit. So did Effie and Toula the next day. They said so over and over again.

"It's great," said Effie. "Where did you get it? Mum, doesn't Marty look great?"

"She's very pretty," said Mrs Despotakis. "Marty, you tell Effie she has to dress nice like you when she goes to school."

Marty nodded without thinking. Then she realised. Me, scruffy Marty! I'm supposed to tell Effie to dress nicely! She looked at Effie, who was giggling. Marty stuck her tongue out at her. Her clothes were a joke now. That was good.

The other girls arrived, and they all piled into the car. Effie's big brother Peter drove them to a boathouse by the river. Mrs Despotakis bought them drinks, and they had a picnic on the lawn.

There were chips and cheezels and meat on sticks and three-cornered cheese pies and little parcels of green leaves and sticky cakes and walnut cake and an ice cream birthday cake. Marty ate everything but the green leaves.

"Have a dolmathe," said Toula, holding one out.

"What is it?" said Marty, looking at it.

"Vine leaves with rice. Go on, it won't bite."

So Marty took the dolmathe and put it in her mouth. It tasted soft and juicy and

ordinary. "It's okay," she said in surprise. Toula laughed at the look on her face.

"What is funny?" asked Mrs Despotakis.

"Marty just ate her first dolmathe," said Toula.

"You think that is funny?" said Mrs Despotakis. "You should see me when I eat my first Australian pie. Terrible! I want to spit it out. My husband is so ashamed of me. But now I cook Greek food sometimes and Australian food sometimes. It's better."

"My sister cooked us a Greek dinner once," said Marty. "But I think she got it wrong."

"You tell her to come to me," said Mrs Despotakis. "Now, Marty, you try this."

Marty ate and ate. Then Mrs Despotakis said they could go on the ferry with her, or the paddle boats with Peter to watch them.

"I'd better go on the paddle boats," said Marty. "I'm full. I need to do something."

"You've eaten too much Greek food. You'll turn into a Greek," giggled Effie.

"So?" said Marty. "Do you want to share a paddle boat with me?"

"Too much hard work," said Effie. "I'm going on the ferry. What about you, Toula?"

"Okay, I'll go with Marty," said Toula. "Come on."

They paddled the boat out into the river. Marty felt shy. She did not know what to say. She liked Toula a lot, but she had talked more to Jimmy and Effie and Con.

"Let's go up to the bridge," said Toula.

"Okay," said Marty.

They paddled in silence for a while. Then Toula stopped paddling and looked at Marty.

"I used to think you were stuck up," she said. "I thought you didn't like us because we were Greek. But I don't think that any more."

"Wow!" said Marty. "I thought you didn't like me because I wasn't Greek. You and Jimmy and Con never talked to me."

"Well, you never talked to us."

They stared at each other.

"That's silly," said Marty. "Oh well, we're talking now."

So they talked about school and their friends and Toula's trip to Greece and Marty's old school. Sometimes they stopped under the willow trees and dipped their hands in the brown water, and sometimes they paddled quickly after the round fluffy ducklings. They forgot the time. Then Toula looked at her watch.

"Oh no, we're late," she said. "Quick!"

They paddled faster and faster, laughing and getting out of breath. They could see the others waiting on the river bank.

"Anyway," Marty remembered suddenly, "you're not Greek now. You're Greek-Australian. Ask Miss Reilly."

"I am so Greek!" said Toula.

"Not if you live in Australia."

Marty told Toula about Greek-Australians and Anglo-Australians. Toula was impressed.

“Hey,” she said. “I never thought of that.”

“Neither did I,” Marty admitted. “Jan told me.”

“Come on,” yelled Effie from the river bank. “Move it, you two.”

“I’m glad we’re friends,” said Toula as they climbed out of the boat.

Friends! Marty nearly fell into the river.

“Me too,” she whispered.

Peter drove them all home. They stopped at Marty’s house last of all. Marty had learnt a new Greek word from Toula. She took a deep breath.

“*Efaristo*,” she said to Mrs Despotakis.

Mrs Despotakis was delighted. She laughed out loud, grabbed Marty’s hands and kissed her on both cheeks. “*Bravo, koritsi*,” she said. “Thank you too.”

“What does that mean?” Marty whispered to Effie.

“Well done, girl.”

Marty felt proud of herself. It had been a good day all round. “Thanks for asking me, Effie,” she said. “It was lovely.”

“That’s all right,” said Effie. “See you at school.”

“*Andio*,” said Marty to Mrs Despotakis.

“Goodbye,” said Mrs Despotakis to Marty. They both laughed.

Marty ran inside, calling, “Mum, Dad.” She wanted to tell them about her lovely day. There was no one in the kitchen, so she made herself a glass of cordial and went into the lounge.

Her family was all there. They were very quiet. Jan was pouring cups of tea, and Mrs Hollitt was sitting in the big chair. Mr Hollitt was holding her hand.

Phil looked up from his book. “Marty, Gran’s dead,” he said.

Marty’s sunny day went away all.

“Oh, *Mum*,” she said. “Poor Mum,” She ran to her mother and hugged her hard. She felt scared. “Mum, you won’t die too, will you?”

Then a strange thing happened. Her mother started to cry and she started to laugh as well. Her mouth went up and down at the same time.

“No, Marty,” she said at last. “I won’t die just yet. I promise.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The night Gran died, Mrs Hollitt cried and told them stories about Gran. But after that, she didn't talk about Gran any more. She was very quiet, and Mr Hollitt was very quiet too. Marty stayed in her room and studied her Greek books most of the time. She liked learning Greek.

"I never thought I spoke English," she said to Toula one day. "I thought I just *spoke*. Do you know what I mean?"

"Not really," said Toula. "I always spoke Greek and English. But I didn't really want to speak Greek until we went to Greece last year. Now I like having two places."

"I wish I did," said Marty.

"You do," said Toula. "You've got England. Remember — I'm Greek-Australian, and you're Anglo-Australian!" She laughed at Marty, and Marty laughed back.

"I forgot!"

Marty went to Toula and Jimmy's house nearly every day after school. She watched TV and played and talked. Their mother gave her small sticky cakes, and their father called her 'the little Greek'. And Toula and Jimmy were her friends.

One evening Marty came home from Toula and Jimmy's house. The kitchen was very clean, and there was roast lamb for dinner. The Hollitts usually only ate roast lamb on Sunday.

"It's not Phil's birthday today, is it?" asked Marty, worried.

"No, but I think we need a party or two," said Mrs Hollitt. "I've been very sad about Gran, and I can't talk about it very well, so I've been moping around."

"Oh yeah," said Marty, interested. She didn't like to talk about her bad feelings either.

She wanted to ask her mother more about it, but her mother was still talking.

“Phil’s birthday is next week, so he’ll have a party then. And you could ask Toula and Jimmy to tea some time, Marty. You’ve been going to their house a lot.”

“But -” said Marty and then stopped.

“I don’t want a party,” said Jan quickly. “You can buy me some books instead.”

“Mercenary child,” said Mr Hollitt. “All right. You’ll get your books.”

“What’s ‘mercenary’ when it’s at home?” said Phil.

“It means Jan loves money,” said Mr Hollitt with a grin.

“I don’t love money,” said Jan. “I love books.”

Marty was thinking hard. She loved going to Toula and Jimmy’s house. But she didn’t want them to come to her house. Toula thought Marty was different, but the Hollitt family was *very* different.

“What about Friday?” said her mother.

Marty tried to think of an excuse but her brain wasn’t working properly.

“Good,” said Jan, looking at the list. “It’s my turn to cook. I’ll try something new.”

Oh no, thought Marty. Jan liked trying something new. Sometimes it was very good, but sometimes it was very bad.

“Oh, yes,” she said in a small voice. Jan and Mrs Hollitt were being nice to her. She couldn’t hurt their feelings and say no. She would have to ask Toula and Jimmy to tea.

She asked them the next morning, and they were very pleased. But Marty felt terrible. By Friday she felt sick with worry. What would Toula think of Jan’s old school dress, and Mr Hollitt’s jokes, and Phil’s cheekiness, and Mrs Hollitt not cooking?

There was only one hope. She would go and see Mr Kidd again.

At lunchtime she slipped away and went to the old factory. She paused in the yard for a moment but she didn’t want to lose her new friends, so she went in. Mr Kidd was polishing his TV with a spray can labelled “Kidd’s Amazing TV Polish”.

“Hello, Marty,” he said. “It’s nice to see you again.”

Marty felt awful. “I’m sorry I haven’t come to see you.”

“Oh, no, no, no. I knew you’d come when you needed me — and people always need a Whizz Kidd. What’s the trouble? How can I help?”

Marty wanted to tell him, but she felt bad about her last game. “I can’t play the Amazing Game Machine again,” she said. “I’ve got the toothpaste here, but I put the hair down the toilet at school.”

“I know,” said Mr Kidd, wagging his finger at her. “That was naughty. Luckily I’m a whizz at finding things.”

He pointed to a little table by the TV. There was the hair. It waved at Marty.

“I’m sorry,” said Marty again.

“Careful — the wind will change, and you’ll be sorry all the time,” said Mr Kidd. “Now, watch my TV for a while, until you feel better.”

He turned the TV on. Marty saw a family sitting at the kitchen table. There was a handsome father and a kind mother and a pretty girl and a freckle-faced boy. They smiled and passed things to each other.

Marty watched the family go for a picnic, and swim in a pool, and go out to dinner at a pizza house. They were happy and good-looking and kind to each other all the time. Marty kept thinking of her own family.

"Stop it," she said to Mr Kidd. "I don't like this programme."

Mr Kidd looked surprised, but he turned the TV off. He sat down beside Marty and looked deep into her eyes.

"Marty," he said, "this TV is a special TV. Actually, it's a Whizz Kidd's Amazing TV Machine. And it shows special programmes for people. This programme is for you, Marty. Why don't you like it?"

"Because my family's not like that," Marty burst out. "The TV family all look right, and they're happy all the time. My family's sad right now, and they're always *weird*."

"Oh dear," said Mr Kidd sadly.

"And Toula and Jimmy are coming to tea," said Marty. "They thought I was weird, but they like me now. But my family is weirder than me."

Mr Kidd turned on the TV again. The TV family was playing tennis together. "You want a family like that," he said.

"Oh yes!" said Marty. "I wish my family was like that. But it's impossible."

"Don't you remember, Marty? Nothing is impossible for a Whizz Kidd and an Amazing Game Machine. Why don't you try it?"

Marty looked at the TV. Toula and Jimmy would like that family. She tried to think it through. She loved Mr and Mrs Hollitt, Jan and Phil. But she would love them just as much if they looked right and were happy all the time.

"What about Mum and Dad and Jan and Phil?" she asked. "Would they be all right? They wouldn't be hurt by the game?"

"You're not sure," said Mr Kidd. "You'd better not play. Maybe Toula and Jimmy will like your family after all."

No, they won't, thought Marty hopelessly. I wish I could borrow the TV family and give it back.

She frowned. She had given back the hat and wand, and the hair and toothpaste. Maybe she could take the TV family for a day, and then give it back too. But that would be cheating. She'd really wanted the other prizes. Now she wanted to have the TV family *and* her own family as well. That wasn't fair.

Mr Kidd won't mind, thought Marty. He's a nice man. And he thinks my family will be all right.

"I'll try to find you another programme," Mr Kidd was saying. He changed the channel. The TV was blank.

“No,” said Marty. “I want to play.”

“Very well then,” said Mr Kidd. “You know the rules. This is your third game now. It’s a special game for you.”

The Amazing Game Machine winked its lights at Marty. She started to play. It was the easiest game of all. The little Marty doll flew up the board. Marty only had to press the buttons twice, and then the doll was in the TV screen beside the TV family.

“There you are,” said Mr Kidd. “They’ll be waiting for you at home. I hope you’re happy with your third prize. Goodbye, Marty.”

“Goodbye. Thanks a lot,” said Marty. She ran back to school, feeling much happier.

## CHAPTER NINE

“What’s your family like?” asked Toula.

Marty wondered about that, too. Should she tell Toula about Jan and Phil and Mr and Mrs Hollitt? Or should she tell her about the family like the family from Mr Kidd’s TV?

“Oh, they’re just ordinary,” she said.

“Yes, but what are they *like*?” said Jimmy.

“Well . . .” Marty didn’t know what to say.

“We’ll see them in a minute, anyway,” said Toula, and smiled at Marty.

Marty gave her a small smile in return. She felt nervous. What was going to happen? She led Jimmy and Toula to the back door of her house, took a deep breath and flung open the door.

The kitchen was full of warm cooking smells. A woman was taking a golden cake from the oven. She had wavy hair and blue eyes and pale lipstick on her smiling mouth. Over her blue dress she wore a crisp white apron.

“Oh,” said Marty.

“Hello,” said the woman. “You must be Jimmy and Tina. I’m Marty’s mother.”

But she wasn’t Mrs Hollitt. The Amazing Game Machine had given Marty a TV mother. For a moment Marty was worried. Never mind, she thought, I can give this family back again.

Toula and Jimmy were looking around wide-eyed. The kitchen was clean and sparkling, and the TV mother was so pretty. Marty felt pleased with herself.

“I’ve made a cake for afternoon tea,” said the TV mother. “So quick and easy. You just add an egg.” She held up the empty packet.

“It looks nice,” said Toula.

The TV mother smiled warmly at her. “Thank you, Tina.”

“I’m Toula,” said Toula.

“Tina,” repeated the TV mother. “Marty, call the others for afternoon tea.”

“Afternoon tea,” called Marty down the hall. She wondered who would answer her call.

Out from Phil’s room ran a small boy in a football jumper. He had a freckled face and yellow hair. A tall man with a tweed coat and a friendly smile followed him. And from Jan’s room came a slim pretty girl with gleaming hair and shining teeth.

Marty gasped. This new family looked wonderful.

“Have a slice of light, fluffy Quick’n’easy sponge cake,” said the TV mother. They all took a slice.

“Mmmmmm. Delicious,” said the TV father, rolling his eyes.

“And it won’t spoil my diet,” said the TV sister, smiling prettily. “Quick’n’easy sponge cake is made from calorie-controlled flour.”

“Please, Mum, I want some more,” said the TV brother.

Marty beamed with pride. Then she noticed that Toula and Jimmy were very quiet. They ate their cake, but they didn’t say anything.

“Well, I must cook the tea,” said the TV mother. “Run along and play, children.”

Marty took Toula and Jimmy to her room. “Well, do you like my family?” she asked.

“They’re not ordinary at all,” said Jimmy. He sounded almost angry.

“What do you mean?” said Marty.

“They all look so nice, and they say all the right things,” said Toula. She smiled at Marty, but her eyes looked unhappy.

“I want you to like them,” said Marty.

Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. She blinked them away quickly, but Toula put her arm around her shoulders.

“Of course, Marty,” she said. “We’ll try. They’re very different from our family, that’s all.”

“And they keep calling you Tina,” said Jimmy. “What’s wrong with Toula for a name?”

“Yes, that’s a bit funny,” said Toula. Her mouth twitched, and she started to laugh. Jimmy and Marty looked at her and then they laughed too.

“Come on, Toula,” said Marty. “I’ll show you my pictures of England.”

Marty showed them her pictures, her shell collection and her books and records. Soon they were laughing and talking together again. Then it was time for tea.

The TV family sat up straight and passed things politely. They ate and ate. Marty still

felt full from afternoon tea. She thought the TV family must be hollow inside.

Jimmy and Toula kept very quiet. After tea, they said they had to go home. Marty went to the gate with them.

“See you tomorrow,” she said. “Can I come to your place after school?”

“If you really want to,” said Toula doubtfully.

“Of course I do,” said Marty. Jimmy and Toula looked as if they didn’t believe her. They said goodbye, and Marty watched them walk down the street. I’ll give the TV family back to Mr Kidd tomorrow, she thought.

The TV family were watching TV. The programme was about a TV family. Marty frowned at them. Why had Mr Kidd given her a TV family anyway? She only wanted her own family to be more like the TV family.

“Oh, look at that lovely dress!” said the TV sister. Marty thought of Jan in her old school dress. No, Jan could never be like the TV sister. Mr Kidd was right. He couldn’t change her family. He could only give her a new TV family.

“Time for bed,” said the TV father.

“And time for a cup of hot Smile-oh,” said the TV mother.

“But it’s summer,” said Marty. “I’m hot already.”

“Smile-oh helps you to sleep,” said the TV sister firmly. “And it contains sulphur, magnesium, calcium, potassium and iron, to help you while you sleep.”

“Yuk,” said Marty. She was tired of the TV family, and she didn’t want to drink a cup of hot Smile-oh.

“Come on, Marty,” said the TV brother. “We all love our Smile-oh.” He grabbed her hand and dragged her into the kitchen.

The TV mother made five cups of Smile-oh, and then the TV family all picked up their cups at the same time.

“We all smile for Smile-oh,” they said together. Then they looked at Marty.

“I don’t want it,” said Marty. “Thank you.”

The TV family said nothing. They just waited and smiled at her. Marty felt smaller and smaller. At last she picked up her cup.

“We all smile for Smile-oh,” she said with the TV family, and then they all sipped from their cups and smiled. Marty jumped up.

“I have to go to bed,” she said.

She went and hid in her room, but she could not sleep. She kept thinking of the TV family in her own family’s rooms. I want my family back, she thought. Now.

Marty put on her clothes in the dark, and climbed out of the window. She tiptoed down the drive, and then ran all the way to the factory. It was dark, and there were little noises in the yard. Marty was scared, but she was more scared of the TV family. She felt her way up the dark stairs and into the big room.

“Mr Kidd,” she called. “Mr Kidd.”

Her voice sounded small in the blackness. It's not fair, thought Marty. Mr Kidd said the third game would be special. This is just specially horrible.

"Mr Kidd!"

Still there was no answer. Marty walked into the dark room. She bumped into machines, but she kept on walking, her hands in front of her. She had to find Mr Kidd.

Then she had a terrible thought. She had cheated Mr Kidd. She had played the game for a TV family, but she had never wanted to keep them. Maybe Mr Kidd was angry with her.

Suddenly Marty's hand touched the wall. She was at the other end of the room, and she had not found the armchair, the TV, the Amazing Game Machine or Mr Kidd.

She ran back, and bumped into a machine. She ran back again, and bumped into the wall. Marty stood and rubbed her arm.

"He's gone," she said into the darkness. "Mr Kidd's gone."

That's why the third game was special, thought Marty. It was the last game. She was stuck with the TV family forever.

## CHAPTER TEN

Marty woke early the next morning. She knew at once that something terrible had happened. Then she remembered. She had given Jan and Phil and Mr and Mrs Hollitt to the Amazing Game Machine, and Mr Kidd had gone.

It was too much. She hid under the sheets, but she couldn't sleep. She decided to go to school early, so she didn't have to see the TV family. She tiptoed quietly downstairs.

"Gotcha!"

The TV brother jumped out at her and gave her a toothy grin. Then he shot her with a plastic gun.

"This is my Soopa-doopa Space Gun, far-out for hours of happy fun," he told her.

"Oh," said Marty.

The door to her parents' bedroom opened, and the TV mother came out.

"Ssh!" she said. Then she looked at the TV brother. "Oh dear. That new white shirt is all grubby. But little boys will be little boys. Luckily I can soak it clean with Soakitclean."

She started to pull the shirt off the TV brother. He gave her a toothy grin. Marty watched in amazement. Why can't he change his own shirts? she wondered.

Then the TV father came out. He picked up Marty and tossed her in the air. "How's my little girl?" he said.

Marty was furious. She hated being picked up. She was ten years old, not five. The TV father ruffled her hair.

"Growing girls need vitamins," he said to the TV mother.

"And so do grown men," she smiled back. "Let's start the day with a glass of vitamin

rich Frooty Orange Juice.”

“Yuk,” said Marty, but no one listened to her.

They sat down to breakfast. The TV sister was late, because she was putting on her makeup. So the TV mother told her about Busy Girl make-up, so quick and easy to apply. Marty thought of Jan, and laughed. Then she wanted to cry.

But she had no time to cry. She had to eat and drink all sorts of things. The TV family smiled at her and told her how good for her everything was. Marty said, “Yuk” every time, but they didn’t mind. They just smiled harder.

Then the TV sister went to meet her boyfriend. The TV brother ran off, bouncing a football. The TV father ruffled Marty’s hair again, and went to work. And the TV mother put on an apron and started to stack the dishwasher.

“Goodbye,” said Marty in a small voice.

The TV mother gave her a lunch box. “If we love our children,” she said, “we give them healthy things to eat. Healthy things like Kidd’s nutritious, vitamin-packed, processed, flavoursome, sanitised, deodorised, delicious . . .”

“Yuk,” said Marty. “I have to go.”

The TV mother leaned down and kissed her on the forehead. Her lips were cold as ice. Marty felt scared. She ran out of the house and down the road. Toula and Jimmy and Con were waiting for her.

“Hi, Marty,” said Jimmy, “Hey, aren’t we going to the TV studios today?”

“Oh no,” groaned Marty.

“See, I told you so,” Jimmy said to Con and Toula. He turned back to Marty. “What’s the matter? Don’t you want to go?”

“We miss a morning of school,” Con pointed out.

“Yeah, that’s good.”

But Marty never wanted to hear the word ‘TV’ again. She wished she could tell her friends about the TV family. It was too weird, though. They had forgotten the magician’s hat and the girl with golden hair. How could they believe her? Marty shivered.

“You can’t be cold on a day like this,” said Con.

Marty looked around at the sunshine. She still felt as cold as ice.

“Maybe you’re catching flu?” said Toula. Marty shook her head. “Here, we’ll rub you warm then.”

As they walked along, Jimmy rubbed her left arm, Con rubbed her right arm and Toula rubbed her back. Marty tingled, and the cold feeling melted away.

“Okay, I’m hot now,” she said. “Thanks a lot.”

They met Miss Reilly, and she took them to the bus. They were going to watch *Let’s Have Fun*, a TV show for kids. Marty’s friends were excited. They wanted to be on TV.

In the TV studio people moved cameras and lights around, swept the floor, carried chairs and tables and got in each other’s way.

“There’s Jolly Jack,” said Effie. She waved at a man in a bright coat. He looked away.

“Huh!” said Effie, hurt. “He seems so nice on TV.”

They waited and waited. Jolly Jack yawned. The kids shuffled.

“I wish we could walk round and look at things,” said Jimmy.

“Well, we can’t,” said Toulou.

Marty and Con were sitting at the end of a row. “Let’s look in that door,” whispered Con.

“Okay,” said Marty.

They opened the door and looked down a long corridor.

“All you can see is more doors,” said Con in disgust.

A small man in blue overalls was opening one of the doors. Marty gasped. It was Mr Kidd.

“I have to talk to that man,” she hissed to Con. “I’ll be back.”

“Marty, stop!” said Con, but she was running down the corridor.

As she ran, she talked to Mr Kidd in her head. “I hate you. Give me back my family. I’ll smash your machine.”

She found the door, and pushed it open. There in the studio was a giant Amazing Game Machine, bigger and brighter than ever before. And there was little Mr Kidd, smiling his kind smile.

“Marty Hollitt!” he said in delight. “You clever girl. I knew I’d see you again.”

Marty burst into tears. “Please,” she sobbed, “take the TV family back.”

Mr Kidd’s blue eyes looked kinder than ever. “Marty, I want to help you. I want you to be happy. I’d like to take the TV family back — but I can’t. You signed a contract, and even a Whizz Kid can’t change that. You can only have three goes at the Amazing Game Machine.”

“You didn’t tell me that!”

“You said you wanted to read the contract, Marty. It’s all there.”

“But I didn’t read it. You know I didn’t. It was too hard.” Marty stamped her foot.

“You’ve been kidding me, all along.”

Mr Kidd laughed heartily. “Yes, I told you I was just a big kid at heart. I *warned* you, Marty. But I’m not a hard man and if you’re not happy, then I haven’t helped you. So I’ll give you another chance. Would you like that?”

“Please. Please.”

“You must listen very carefully this time. Promise?”

Marty nodded.

“Very well then. You can play the Amazing Game Machine one more time. If you win, you can have your family back — but no more prizes. If you lose, remember, you work for me after school.”

“What would I have to do?” asked Marty in a small voice.

“Oh, this and that. You’d be my helper. I want to find more people to play the Amazing Game Machine. You could bring your friends Toula and Effie and Jimmy and Con along first.”

“No!” said Marty. She thought of Effie swapping Mrs Despotakis for a TV mother, or Toula with long golden hair. It was awful.

“Yes!” said Mr Kidd. “That’s the deal. One more thing. This time you play the game backwards, of course. You have to make the doll go back to the start, not up into the TV. But it should be easy. You’re such a clever girl.”

Marty looked up at Mr Kidd. He was kidding her again. The other games had been easy because Mr Kidd had let her win. This time the game would be hard. He didn’t want her to win now. If she lost, she would be his helper. His prize.

The Amazing Game Machine flashed its lights in her eyes. Marty thought fast. If she lost, she would have to take her friends to Mr Kidd. And she might easily lose. But if she didn’t play, then her mother and father and Jan and Phil were gone for good.

Marty took a deep breath. “I’ll play,” she said.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Marty stood in front of the Amazing Game Machine for the last time. She was very, very frightened. The TV screen at the end of the board was blank. There was no prize for Marty this time. But she didn't want a prize — she wanted her family.

She stared at the blank screen. Her mind was blank too. Then a memory stirred in her mind. Mr Kidd saying, "You put a fire screen in front of a fire. You put a fly screen in front of a fly. So a TV screen must be in front of something." Maybe that was a clue. What was behind this TV screen?

Marty kept staring at the screen. She started to see moving shapes. She stared harder and harder, and the picture grew clearer and clearer.

She saw the factory, but now it was clean and sparkling. The machines were working, and hundreds of blue boxes were pouring down the production line. All the workers were dressed in blue overalls, like Mr Kidd. Among them were Mrs Hollitt, Jan, Mr Hollitt, and even Phil.

Look at me, Marty thought.

And Jan looked up. She turned to Mr Hollitt and he looked at Marty too. Then they all ran to the edge of the TV screen, and all the other workers ran with them. They gazed at Marty, trying to say something, but Marty couldn't hear them.

"Marty Hollitt," said Mr Kidd, "it's time for you to play my game."

Marty gulped. She pulled the lever. The little Marty doll shot up the board. She pressed the right hand button by mistake. The doll shot further up the TV screen.

Marty glanced up at the screen. The people were pointing to the left. In desperation

Marty pressed the left hand button. The doll shot back.

“Oh!” said Marty.

“Oh ...” said Mr Kidd.

So Marty watched the people in the factory, not the Game Machine. They pointed left, right, left, left, and Marty pressed buttons frantically. Suddenly they gave a silent cheer. Marty looked down. The Marty doll was back where it had started.

She turned round to Mr Kidd. He was smiling his old kind smile.

“Well,” he said, “I don’t know how you did it. But it looks as if you’ve won.”

Marty looked sideways at the TV screen. The factory doors were open, and all the workers were walking out. The blue boxes were piling up on the line and falling on the floor. Then the picture faded. Marty gave a sigh of relief.

“I always said you were a clever girl, Marty,” said Mr Kidd. “You really know how to work the Amazing Game Machine. Why don’t you sign up for another round? Maybe this time you’ll win the prize you really want.”

His pale opal eyes gleamed at Marty. She could see shining pictures in them. For a moment she really wanted to play the game again. Then she said, “No!” Mr Kidd blinked.

“No,” Marty said more softly. “I’m sorry, Mr Kidd, but I don’t like your game, and I don’t want to play it any more.”

Mr Kidd sighed. “All right, Marty. I see your point. Here, let’s shake hands, to show we can still be friends.”

Marty held out her hand. Then she stopped. “I’m sorry,” she said again. “But I don’t want to be your friend. You took my family, and you wanted to take Toula and Jimmy.”

Mr Kidd smiled at her. “I don’t think I made you very happy, Marty. Never mind. If you want me again some day, I’m always around.”

Marty turned and marched to the door. She looked back. There was Mr Kidd, a dark shadow against the lights of the giant Amazing Game Machine.

“No,” said Marty softly.

She went out, shut the door behind her and ran down the corridor and into the studio. Con was talking to Miss Reilly, saying, “She was here a minute ago. She might have gone to the toilet.”

“There you are,” said Toula. “Quick. We’re going now.”

“Marty,” said Miss Reilly, “I told you not to wander off . . . Oh well, never mind. What did you think of the show?”

They followed Miss Reilly out the door. Marty nudged Toula. “Help,” she whispered. “I missed the show.”

“I thought Jolly Jack was really rude,” said Toula to Miss Reilly. “He didn’t look at us at all.”

“Yeah, and when the TV cameras were off, he just looked at himself in the mirror,”

said Effie.

"This show's supposed to be for kids," said Con. "He thought we were just clapping machines or something."

"What did you think, Jimmy?" said Miss Reilly.

Jimmy frowned. "I reckon I could write something better than that."

"Okay," said Miss Reilly. "If you can write something, I'll help you make a videotape of it. You can play a videotape on an ordinary TV set, so you'll have your own TV show."

"Great," said Jimmy. "We can do it. Just wait and see."

All the way home he couldn't stop talking about the new idea. "We could do a bit like Ripper and the Bean," he said. "Someone gets shot every two minutes. Then at the end there's no one left, so the Bean shoots Ripper, and Ripper shoots the Bean."

"We can have commercials too," said Toula. "A commercial in Greek, for spray-on baklava or something."

"But we ought to have someone who tells you what everything is," said Jimmy.

"A compere," said Effie.

"All right, a compere, clever."

"What about a sort of TV wizard?" said Marty. "Taking all the shows out of his hat." She made her voice go deep. "And for my next trick I give you Drippy and the Scream."

"Great!" said Jimmy. "You can play the wizard, Marty."

Marty laughed to herself. That would put Mr Kidd in his place. She would be the TV wizard in their own TV show.

But back at school she kept worrying about her family. She looked for Phil at recess, but she couldn't find him. Still, he could be somewhere else in the yard.

After school the others wanted to talk to Miss Reilly about the TV show but Marty said goodbye and ran home. She burst into the kitchen. Jan was making a sandwich with fruit cake crumbs and orange slices. Marty threw her arms around her and hugged her.

"Anyone would think you hadn't seen me for a week," said Jan. She hugged Marty back, then put the top on her sandwich. "Want a bite?"

"Yuk. No," said Marty. Jan grinned. "Where's everyone?"

"In the lounge," said Jan. "There's a surprise for you."

Marty's stomach sank. Maybe the TV father and mother and brother were still there. She walked slowly to the lounge. Through the door came a strange flickering light and the sound of swelling music. She took a deep breath and stepped into the room.

Phil was lying on the floor and painting on a big sheet of paper. Mrs Hollitt was reading the newspaper. And Mr Hollitt was sitting in front of the TV. Phil looked up.

"We've got a TV, not a stereo," he said in disgust. "All because of you."

"We talked about it," said her mother, "and we decided that you were right. Everyone else has TV. We should see what it's like."

“It’s not bad either,” said her father, turning round. “I was wrong. I can see the news on the TV.”

Jan came up behind Marty. “But we’ve got to make a list soon,” she said. “Otherwise Dad’ll hog the TV all the time.”

Marty stood and stared. She didn’t know what to think. After Mr Kidd, she never wanted to see a TV again. And now they’d got a TV, because of her. It was — no, it wasn’t awful. It was funny. It was *very* funny.

Marty started to laugh. She laughed so hard that she had to sit down and hold her stomach. Mr Hollitt said, “What’s the matter?” and Phil snorted, and Jan prodded her with her foot.

“Marty,” said Mrs Hollitt. “What’s the joke? Don’t you want a TV any more?”

Marty looked across at the TV. A TV family was buying a new car, smiling their usual smiles at everyone. I’ll need to watch things like that for the TV show we’re making at school, she thought. And it’s good to know that Mum and Dad listen to me.

“Yeah, sure,” she said. “Thanks.”

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